

The history, art and performance of ghazal in Hindustani sangeet

Ghazal, which means 'talking to a beautiful young lady', has carried on its popularity for over 15 centuries. It continues to evolve both as a form of poetry and as a genre of music

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DECEMBER 22, 2017



The most popular expression of poetry in Urdu and Persian, the ghazal, is known as much as a poetic form as it is as a genre of music. The ghazal has roots in seventh century Arabia and gained prominence in the 13th and 14th century due to works of Persian poets like Rumi and Hafiz. Indian poets started writing ghazal in Urdu and Persian in the eighteenth century.

The name of the poem is based on the Arabic word, ghazal, which means 'talking to a beautiful young lady.' Ghazal originated in Arabia long before the birth of Islam. It is a derivative of the Arabic panegyric qaseeda, which consisted of three sections: the naseeb, the raheel and any standard form of poetry. The naseeb was the introductory portion of the qaseeda that dealt with themes of nostalgia, romance and longing. The subject of the raheel was loneliness and isolated existence in current times. The third section of the qaseeda described pride in one's ruler, tribe and morality. The naseeb developed into the ghazal, which became the most enduring form of poetry dealing with the themes of love, longing and separation. It separated itself from the qaseeda and became an independent and important poetic form during the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750), the second of the four major Arab caliphates established after the death of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The development of the ghazal continued until the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258), the third of four major Arab caliphates.

In its early days, ghazal had four main topics: udhari: courtly love, hissi: erotic love, mudhahakkar: homoerotic love and tamhidi: introductory couplets for other poetic forms.

The ghazal spread to Persia during the Abbasid period and started gaining popularity among the Persian speaking populace. By the 13th century, the ghazal had become the most important Persian poetic form, primarily due to the spread of Sufism. The subject of romantic love and longing was often replaced by love for the creator and a longing to be connected to the divine. At the same time, the ghazal spread to India. Ameer Khusrau became one of the first South Asian poets to write and popularize ghazal. Wali Muhammad Wali Deccani was the first established poet who composed ghazal in the Urdu language and compiled a diwan (collection) of Urdu ghazals.

In terms of form, a ghazal consists of couplets, each one of which is known as a sher. A ghazal can consist of any number of couplets, although the number is generally between five and fifteen. The couplets of the original Arabic ghazal were linked to each other. This form is rarely used today and most ghazals have couplets that are independent of each other in terms of subject and theme. A ghazal in which the couplets are not independent is known as ghazal-e-musalsal.

The primary subject of ghazal has always been and continues to be love, or Ishq. This is broadly divided into two categories: Ishq-e-Majazi, which is worldly love, and Ishq-e-Haqeeqi, which is divine love. The distinction between the two categories of love is often vague and subject to interpretation by readers.

The structure of ghazal is established by a number of factors.

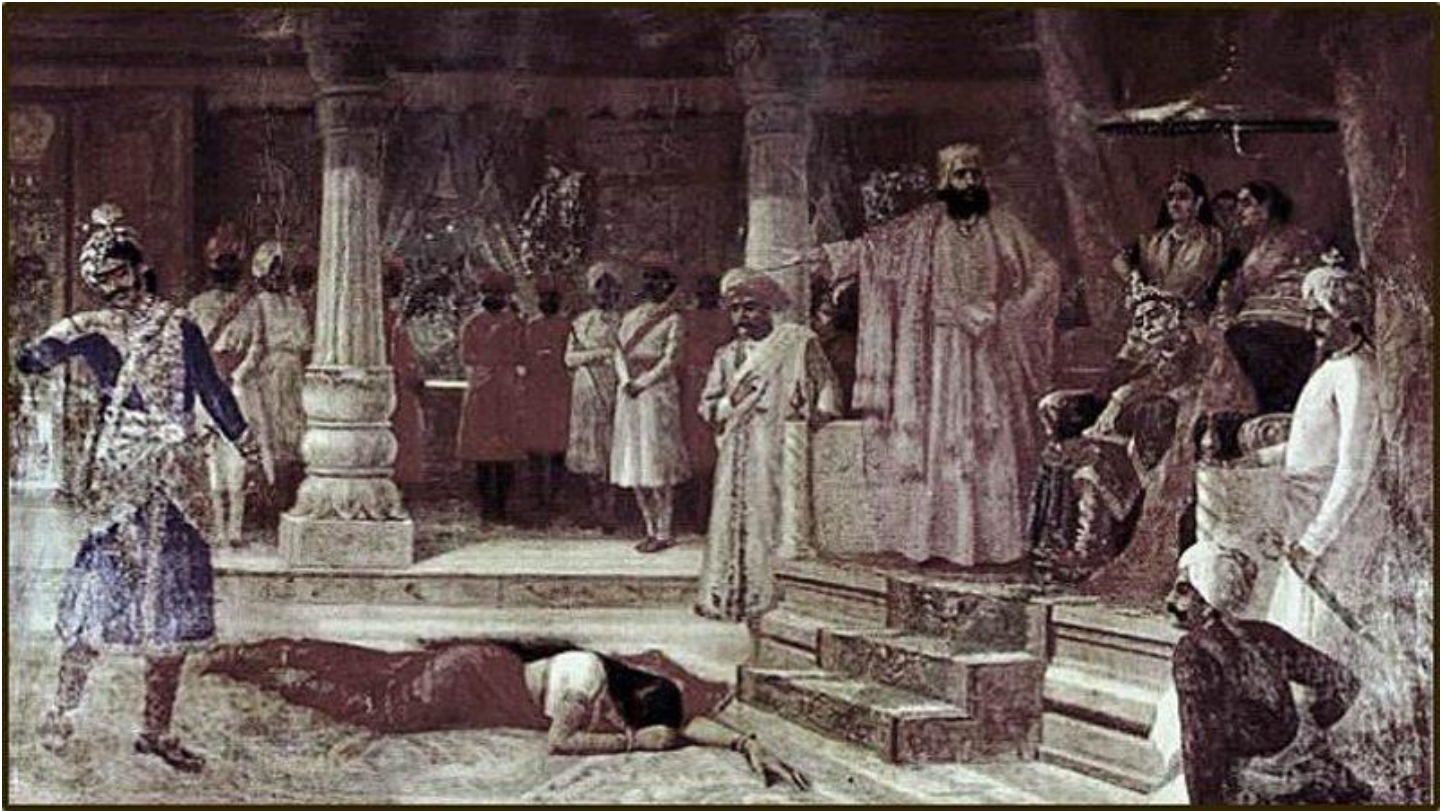
The basic unit of a ghazal is the sher (plural ashar) or the couplet. Each couplet consists of two lines, each of which is known as the misra. The first line of a couplet is known as misra-e-oola and the second is known as misra-e-sani. The last word(s) of the misra-e-sani of each couplet and both misras of the first couplet of the ghazal, is the same. This known as the radeef. A rhyming word(s) precedes the radeef and is known as the qafiya. The main rhyme of the ghazal is established by the qafiya, whereas the radeef serves as the refrain. The first couplet of the ghazal is known as the matla and the last one as maqta. The takhallus, or the pen name of the poet, is often included in the maqta.

The meter of all the couplets in a ghazal is the same and is known as behar. It is a specific structural pattern that consists of combinations of meaningless words known as the rukan (plural arkan) that define the length of a couplet. The total number of arkan is eight: fa-uu-lun, faa-i-lun, ma-faa-ii-lun, mus-taf-i-lun, faa-i-laa-tun, mu-ta-faa-i-lun, ma-faa-i-la-tun, and maf-uu-la-at. There is a total of 19 behars: Beher-e-Rajaz, Beher-e-Ramal, Beher-e-Baseet, Beher-e-Taweel, Beher-e-Kaamil, Beher-e-Mutadaarik, Beher-e-Hazaj, Beher-e-Mushaakil, Beher-e-Madeed, Beher-e-Mutaqaarib, Beher-e-Mujtas, Beher-e-Muzaara, Beher-e-Munsareh, Beher-e-Wafer, Beher-e-Qareeb, Beher-e-Saree, Beher-e-Khafeef, Beher-e-Jadeed, and Beher-e-Muqtazeb. These behars are broken into two hemistiches, except in the case of Beher-e-Rajaz which is trimetric.

The behar, qafiya and radeef establish the prosodic structure of the ghazal known as zameen. All couplets of a ghazal are written in the same zameen.

The primitive Arabic ghazal did not have all the features of contemporary ghazal. The Persian ghazal added five features to the origin poetic form: use of radeef, concept of matla, autonomy of couplets, use of takhallus in maqta and the option of not having the two misras form a sentence.

The ghazal, both structurally and thematically, lends itself very easily to singing. Individual, recorded instances of the singing of ghazal can be found as far back as the 12th century. The ghazals of Jalaluddin Rumi and Khawaja Shamsuddin Mu'ammad Shirazi became popular with singers in the 13th and 14th centuries.



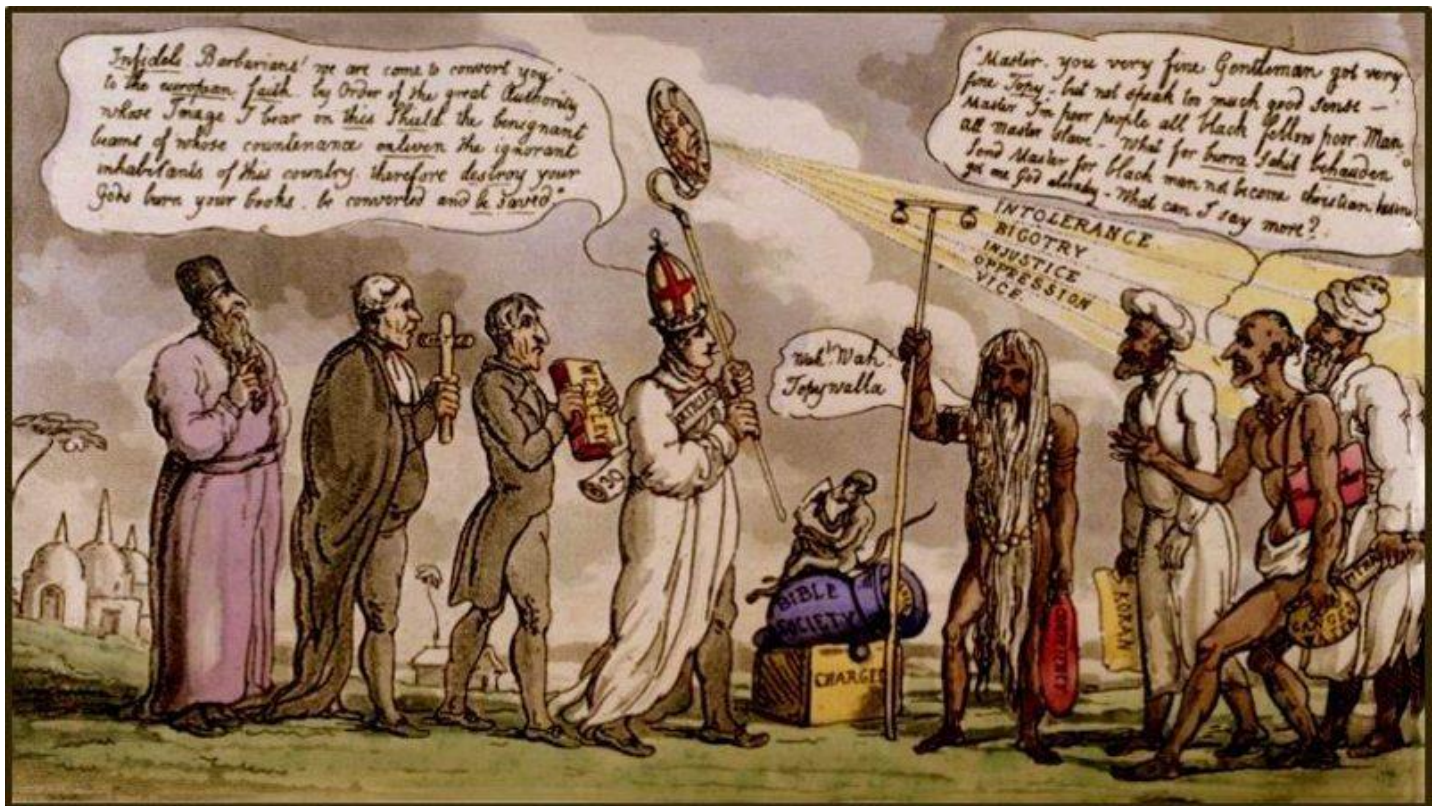
In India, the tradition of singing ghazal was established by Hazrat Amir Khusrau. A fixed, melodic composition is known as bandish in Hindustani Sangeet, the music of Pakistan and North India. It is set to a specific raag (melodic mode) and taal (rhythmic cycle). The first part of the bandish is known as asthai and the second as antara. In singing the ghazal, the matla is used as asthai and the rest of the couplets as antaras. The arrangement allows both convenience and facility to vocalists. The raags employed in singing ghazal tend to be popular ones that afford singers the latitude and ability to explore a wide range of emotions in their song. These include Bhairavi, Kafi, Khammaj, Pahari, and Pilu. Ghazals are almost always set to rhythmic cycles of six, seven or eight beats, known as Dadra, Roopak and Keherwa respectively. The use of the seven beat time-cycles in the singing of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar's ghazals is so common that a variant of the Roopak taal, known as Mughlai, has come to be associated with singing ghazals similar in structure to his poems.

The first singers of ghazal in recorded history were Meher Afroze and Nusrat Khatoon. The two vocalists were celebrated singers who sang Amir Khusrau's ghazals in the Khilji courts. They were at the height of their popularity during the 20 year reign of the second ruler of the Khilji dynasty, Sultan Allauddin Khilji. The establishment of ghazal as a major genre of Hindustani Sangeet started in the early 19th century. The popularity of ghazal as a music genre can be attributed to four factors:

- * The establishment of Parsi Theater
- * Popularity in the courts of Lucknow
- * The changing landscape for courtesans
- * The advent of the recording companies

The Parsi community in India established more than 20 drama companies in the period between 1853 and 1869. The Parsi Natak Mandali, Zoroastrian Theatrical Club, Victoria Natak Mandali, Natak Uttejak Company, Empress Victoria Theatrical Company and Alfred Natak Mandali were the most famous of these

drama companies. They produced plays primarily in four languages: Urdu, Hindustani, Gujarati and English. Music was an integral part of Parsi Theatre. Ghazal was an important genre in the repertoire of music of these companies. The popularity of Parsi Theatre contributed directly to the popularity of ghazal as a genre of music. The success of the drama companies led to the development of theatre in regional languages notably modern Gujarati theatre, Marathi theatre and Hindi theatre and later to the development of Hindi cinema. Over the years, ghazal found a home in both in Indian theatre and cinema.



Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was the 10th and last nawab of Awadh, “the garden, granary, and queen-province of India.” The nawab was a patron of the arts and an accomplished poet, playwright, choreographer and dancer himself. He penned two collections of poetry – Husn-e-Akhtar and Diwan-e-Akhtar, using the pen name Akhtar Piya. His ghazals were immensely popular in Awadh and in certain parts of India. Shah had a great interest in kathak dance. The kathak of early 19th century was a simple dance form. It had not yet been transformed into an elaborate school of dance by Bindadin and Kalka Prasad Maharaj. Kathak’s repertoire of composed pieces, the toras and tukras at the time, was limited, and its primary focus was storytelling. The dance was aesthetically pleasing and elegant but not intricate and complex. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah helped develop the dance form by introducing ghazal to kathak. He had court dancers perform kathak to ghazals he had written. Court musicians Sanad Piya and Qadir Piya who were known for composing hundreds of bandish ki thumris, composed ghazals for kathak. The courts of Lucknow, therefore, became the breeding ground for ghazals that were sung for the accompaniment of dance.

Courtesans had always held an important and often, a respected position in Mughal India. They were divided into more than ten different classes: Beswa, Devdasi, Domni, Kanchani, Kanjari, Kasbi, Nochi, Paturiya, Randi and Tawaif.

A Beswas was primarily a sex worker who got into long-term contracts and muta (temporary) marriages with her clients. A devdasi was a woman who devoted her entire life to the worship and service of an idol, deity or temple. She was not allowed to marry and was almost always subjected to sexual abuse. A domni made her living by singing for both men and women and belonged to a family of singers that had been in the profession for several generations. A kanjari was a lower class courtesan with little or no education and no formal training in the arts. The Kanchni was a sex worker whose services could be engaged on hourly and daily bases. The kasbi was a prostitute who belonged to family of sex workers. Nochi was the name given to

a young girl who was under the training of an experienced courtesan. She was expected to be a virgin. Paturiya was a woman who entertained men to make a living. The randi was a prostitute who did not belong to a family of sex workers. She was considered to be of lower class than a kasbi.

The tawaif was a high class courtesan. She was a master in several arts – singing, dancing, acting, poetry, literature and cooking and was known to be erudite, well-read, often multi-lingual and an authority on decorum and etiquette. The tawaifs were divided into two categories: the gharanedar tawaif and the regular tawaif. The gharanedar tawaif belonged to a family of the highest class of courtesans. She catered, almost exclusively, to nobility, senior officers of the Raj and the elite. A regular tawaif did not come from a family of respected tawaifs; therefore, did not command the respect accorded to gharanedar courtesans. Her clients were the nouveaux riche and men from castes that include sheikhs (tradesman), gujjars (herdsmen), jats (landowners) and qazis (officers and bureaucrats).



Christian missionaries started arriving in India after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. They quickly appointed themselves as guardians of Indian morality and opposed the courtesans and their trade with a vicious, venomous hatred. All classes of courtesans were treated with the same loathing and disdain by the missionaries. They labeled the trade of the courtesans as anti-Christian, immoral and repugnant. Officers of the British Raj who had, heretofore, been patrons of the courtesans were asked to not attend nautch performances and engage the services of courtesans. The tawaifs were forced to add a veneer of respectability to their services by taking up new activities. These included writing, composing and singing ghazals. Malika Jaan Benares Wali and Mah Laqa Begum compiled collections of poetry known as Makhzan-E-Ulfat Malika and Gulzar-E-Mah Laqa respectively. The writing, recitation and singing of ghazal flourished in the environment and tawaifs started attending mushairas (gatherings of poets) and music soirées where ghazal was sung.

The advent of the gramophone (a sound machine that uses a flat spinning disk) and the phonograph (a sound machine that uses a spinning cylinder) at the turn of the 19th century brought music into the homes of people. The maximum recording time of early records, about three minutes, was more suitable for ghazal than for other classical forms of music. The ghazal, therefore, benefited from the introduction of the gramophone and the phonograph.

The first commercial recordings of Indian music were made by Frederick William Gaisberg in London, on seven inch single side discs, in 1898 and 1899. Known as the London Recordings, they included performances of ghazals by Mirza Assadullah Khan Ghalib, Hafiz Shirazi and Zaheer Fariabi.

Frederick William Gaisberg came to India in 1902 and along with George Dillnutt, recorded 216 seven inch wax matrices and 336 ten inch wax matrices in Calcutta. A large number of the recordings consisted of ghazals. Gauhar Jaan recorded raag Jogiya on November 02, 1902 and became the first singer to be recorded in India. Her records gained great popularity in India and in many other countries, very quickly. Five of her ghazals were the biggest hits of her time.

* Yeh Na Thi Hamari Qismat Ke Wisal Yaar Hota

* Ae Dard E Dil Kisy Din Hona Juda Na Hum Se

* Dil-E-Nakam Ki Hasrat Na Jeetay Ji Kabhi Nikli

* Mere Dard-E-Jigar Ki Khabar Hi Naheen

* Shab-E-Wisal Jo Hum Ne Lipat Ke Pyar Kiya

A very large number of vocalists recorded ghazals in the early 20th century. The genre became increasingly popular as the number of gramophones in the country grew. The early hits included a number of ghazals recorded by well-known vocalists from all over India.

Azam Bai Pisal of Kolhapur

Kya Lutf Zindagi Ka

Fazal Hussain Khan of Lahore

Baagh Main Koocha-E-Janan

Allah Bandi of Jaipur

Jafayein Karte Jaate Hain

Gauhar Jan of Agra

Ye Na Thi Hamari Qismat

Imam Bandi of Delhi

Yun Karna Jabeen-E-Shauq Meri

Janki Bai of Allahbad

Munsafi Duniya Se Sari Uth Gayi

Mehmooda Jan of Meeruth

Fana Ka Jaam Ae Saqi To Bhar De

Malika Jan of Agra

Hum Ne Dekheen Na Suneen

Zohra Bai of Agra

Pi Ke Hum To Chale

The art of performance, the abhinay, is an essential part of singing ghazal. The oldest surviving ancient Indian work on performance arts, Bharat Muni's Natya Shastra divides abhinay into four categories: angik abhinaya, vachik abhinay, ahari abhinay and satvik abhinay. The four categories of abhinay are essential for understanding the different styles of singing ghazal.

Angik abhinay refers to the use of the movement of various parts of the body in performance. The movements of the hands or hastak and facial expressions or mukhaj abhinaya, fall under the category of angik abhinay. Vachika abhinay represents the use of speech and song in performance. Ahari abhinay is the employment of costumes, jewelry, make-up, stage design, props and decorative items in a performance. Satvik abhinay refers to the use of expression and the communication of spiritual, emotional, transcendent and numinous states.

The ghazal is, today, the most popular genre of poetry and music in India and Pakistan. It is performed in a large number of styles by huge number of singers.

The major styles of singing ghazal are:

- * Parsi Theater Style

- * Raag-based Ghazal Style

- * Thumri Style

- * Geet Style

- * Mujra Style

- * Qawwali Style

- * Batarannum Mushaira Style

The angik, vachik and ahari abhinay are employed in the Parsi Theater Style of singing ghazal. The poetry is generally florid, emotional and simple, with an emphasis on ishq-e-majazi. Elaborate orchestras featuring both Western and Eastern instruments are used in this style. Tahira Syed's ghazal 'Ab wo ye keh rahe hain meri maan jaiye', in raag Bheemlasi and taal Keherwa, is an example of a ghazal sung in the style of Parsi Theater.

The raag-based ghazal style deals with just the vachik abhinay. A studied and strict fidelity to the underlying raag is observed. Extensive improvisation is the hallmark of the style. Old, complex and abstruse poetry is generally sung in this style. Ghazals with themes of both ishq-e-majazi and ishq-e-haqeeqi are sung in this style. Very few, mostly Eastern, musical instruments are used for accompaniment. Mehdi Hassan's ghazal 'Ranjish Hi Sahi Dil Hi Dukhane Ke Liye Aa', in raag Aiman and taal Dadra, is an example of a raag-based ghazal.

All four abhinay are employed in the thumri style of singing ghazal. Traditional poetry with an emphasis on ishq-e-majazi is generally used. The singer has great flexibility in embellishing the underlying raag and mixing different raags in his rendition. Eastern musical instruments are used for accompaniment. Ustad Barkat Ali Khan's ghazal 'Dono Jahan Teri Muhabbat Main Haar Ke', in raag Bhairavi and taal Dadra, is an example of a ghazal sung in the thumri style.

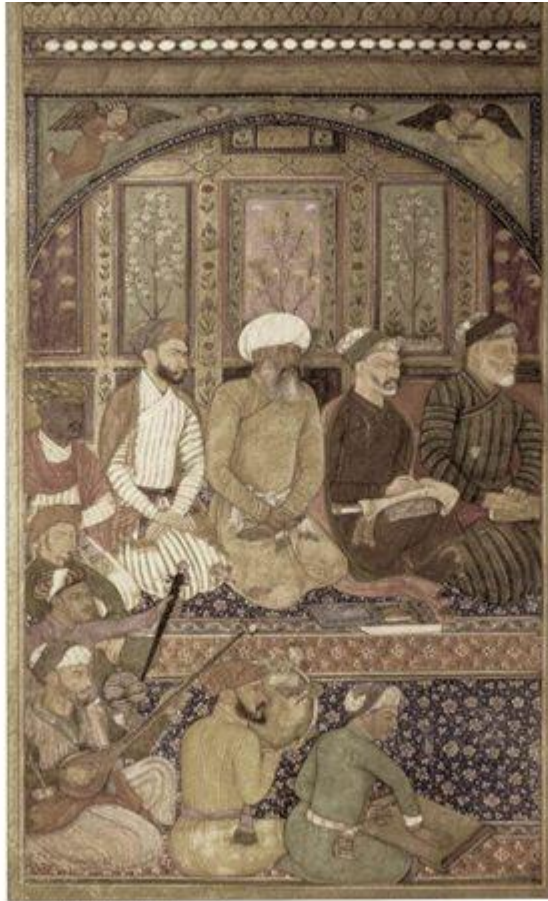
The angik, vachik and ahari abhinay are used in the geet style of singing ghazal. Elaborate orchestras featuring both Western and Eastern instruments are used for accompaniment and interludes. The poetry is simple and hummable and almost exclusively deals with ishq-e-majazi. Little, if any, improvisation is done during the performance. A good example of the style is Khursheed Begum's classic ghazal 'Zehaal E Miskeen Makan Taghaful'.

The angik, vachik, ahari and saatvik abhinay are all used in the mujra style of singing ghazal. Traditional, romantic poetry dealing with ishq-e-majazi is performed in this style. Eastern musical instruments are used. The first misra of each couplet is usually sung without rhythm, with some improvisation. Rhythm is added in the second misra, where typically, no improvisation is done. A number of raags can be added to embellish the underlying raag in this style of singing ghazal. Malika Mausuqui Roshanara Begum's ghazal 'Honay Ko To Kya Hua Nahi Hai', in raag Madhmaad Sarang and taal Keherwa, is a great example of a ghazal sung in the mujra style.

Qawwals almost exclusively employ the saatvik abhinay when singing ghazal. The harmonium, dholak and tabla are the instruments used in this style. Poetry where the distinction between ishq-e-haqeeqi and ishq-e-majazi is vague is generally sung in this style. Qawwals tend to incorporate Sufi and other poetic texts into the ghazal during performance. A considerable amount of improvisation is done while rendering ghazal in this style. Fareed Ayaz Qawwal's ghazal 'Sajda Kar Ke Qadam-E-Yaar Pe Qurban Hona', in raag Janupuri and taal Keherwa is an example of a ghazal sung in the Qawwali Style.

A number of poets like to sing their ghazals in what is known as the Batarannum Mushaira Style. No musical instruments are used and only vachik abhinay are employed. Zehra Nigah, Saroor Barbankvi and Hafeez Julludhari are known for presenting ghazal in this style.

India and Pakistan have produced an incredibly large number of singers who have excelled in singing ghazal. They can be divided into four groups:



THE PIONEERS

Akhtari Bai Faizabadi, Ustad Barkat Ali Khan, Gauhar Jan, Inayat Bai Dheroo Wali, Juthika Roy, Kamla Jharia, Kundan Laal Saigal, Malika Pukhraj, Master Madan and Mukhtar Begum.

THE LEADERS

Asha Bhosle, C H Atma, Kajjan Begum, Kanan Devi, Khurshid Bano, Lata Mageshkar, Muhammad Rafi, Muneer Hussain, Munnawar Sultana, Naseem Begum, Noor Jehan, Pankaj Malik, Raj Kumari, Saleem Raza, Talat Mahmood and Zahida Parveen.

THE STARS

Abida Parveen, Amjad Parvez, Asad Amanat Ali Khan, Ustad Amanat Ali Khan, Bilquees Khanum, Ejaz Hussain Hazarvi, Ejaz Qaiser, Farida Khanum, Fida Hussain, Ghulam Abbas, Ghulam Ali Habib, Wali Muhammad, Hamid Ali Khan, Hussain Bakhsh Bullo, Iqbal Bano, Mehdi Hassan, Mehnaz, Munni Begum, Naheed Akhtar, Nayyara Noor, Parvez Mehdi, Runa Laila, Shahida Parveen, Shaukat Ali, Tahira Syed, Tasawur Khanum and Tina Sani.

THE MODERNISTS

Ahmad Hussain, Anup Jalota, Bhupinder Singh, Chaya Ganguli, Chitra Singh, Fareeha Parvez, Hariharan, Jagjit Singh, Mitali Singh, Muhammad Hussain, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Pankaj Udhaas, Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and Talat Aziz.

Major singers of ghazal include Ustad Barkat Ali Khan, Malika Pukhraj, Akhtari Bai Faizabadi, Noor Jehan, Mehdi Hassan, Farida Khanum, Iqbal Bano, Ghulam Ali, Munni Begum, Jagjit Singh, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Nanyara Noor.

The ghazal has a rich history of 1500 years and is the most popular form of Urdu poetry today. It is also the most enduring and well-known genre of music in Pakistan and India. Ghazal is a performative poetic form and best enjoyed when sung with skill, feeling, understanding, knowledge and competence. The popularity of ghazal has not diminished over 15 centuries. Ghazal continues to evolve and has a future both as a form of poetry and as a genre of music.

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Published in Daily Times, December 22nd 2017.